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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003593

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: HOUSE SETS RULES FOR IMPEACHMENT COMPLAINT

REF: A. MANILA 3458

[B](#). MANILA 3391

[C](#). MANILA 3367

Classified By: Political Officer Timothy Cipullo for
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The House has set the rules for the Opposition's impeachment complaint against President Arroyo. The rules will allow the House to refer the complaint to the Senate at any point if the Opposition is able to show that it has attained requisite support (79 members). The Opposition is now claiming that 52 members have signed its complaint, a gain of ten from last count, while pro-Arroyo politicians have predicted that they will be able to block the complaint. On August 1, a former Malacanang official publicly accused Arroyo of giving payoffs to election officials before the May 2004 elections. Malacanang has denied the charges. The Opposition appears less confident that it will be able to impeach Arroyo and now seems to be aiming to use the hearings more as a platform to criticize her. End Summary.

House Sets Rules

[1](#)2. (U) After heated debate, the House of Representatives has adopted rules to govern impeachment proceedings against President Arroyo. (Note: The Opposition's impeachment complaint against Arroyo, filed on July 25, claimed that she had engaged in abuse of power and corruption, among other charges -- see ref b. End Note.) Lawmakers, on August 1, settled on the same set of rules used during the impeachment of then-President Joseph "Erap" Estrada in 2000-01. Under these rules, additional representatives may sign on to the complaint after its initial filing, and, if 1/3 of the House (79 members) sign the complaint at any point, hearings will be terminated in that body. Should this happen, the President will be considered impeached and the complaint will be transmitted to the Senate for the trial to begin. If the figure of 79 members is not reached, however, the impeachment complaint will lapse after review in the House for the required sixty working days.

[1](#)3. (C) Although the House has agreed on the basic framework of the rules, pro-Arroyo and Opposition lawmakers continue to dispute some of the provisions. Both sides disagree, for example, as to which version of the complaint will be accepted by the House. (Note: The complaint filed by the Opposition on July 25 amended an earlier charge sheet filed by a private citizen. The pro-Arroyo side believes the earlier complaint is the official one. End Note.) Jimmie Policarpio, a former GRP official who is now with the Opposition, told Acting Pol/C on August 1 that there remained "significant" areas where the two sides "can come into conflict over the rules" and he predicted that some matters could wind up in the Supreme Court.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In terms of next steps, the House Justice Committee is scheduled to begin a formal review of the complaint next week. Ronnie Zamora, an Opposition House member, has told us that he did not think that the Committee hearings would get into an in-depth review of issues until September when he said the Opposition would begin to call its main witnesses.

Jockeying for Support

[1](#)5. (C) Opposition members have said publicly that at least 10 more lawmakers have signed their impeachment complaint in the week since it was filed. (Note: Forty-two members endorsed it on July 25. End Note.) The ten new names would give the complaint a total of 52 endorsements. This figure remains well short of the 79 endorsements needed in order to send the complaint to the Senate. When asked about the status of the complaint by Acting Pol/C on August 2, Ramon "Eki" Cardenas, an Opposition figure, replied "so far, so good." Cardenas went on to assert that the opposition felt upbeat about its prospects "given that the Opposition has gotten many signatures despite huge pressure from Malacanang on members not to sign."

16. (C) Pro-Arroyo politicians respond that they are confident that their side has enough support to block the impeachment move in the House. Speaker Jose De Venecia, a staunch Arroyo supporter, told us on August 2 that he had firm support in the House and could prevent impeachment. De Venecia has publicly announced that the Administration has 189 firm commitments from lawmakers not to sign the impeachment complaint, more than enough to block the complaint in the 236-member House.

A New Allegation

17. (U) In the meantime, another allegation has cropped up against Arroyo. Michaelangelo Zuce, a former Malacanang political operative, asserted in an August 1 press conference that President Arroyo had cronies bribe Commission on Elections (COMELEC) officials to ensure her victory in the May 2004 elections. Zuce claimed that he helped arrange -- and then personally attended -- two meetings called by the President with COMELEC officials where she asked for their support in January 2004. After Arroyo left the meetings, Zuce claimed that an Arroyo crony gave 30,000 pesos (approximately USD 535) to each COMELEC official present. He further claimed that he personally paid bribes to Mindanao election officials using money from Malacanang coffers. Malacanang has vigorously denied the charges. Arroyo, for example, publicly labeled the charges as more "black propaganda" by the Opposition, claiming that her rights had been violated by "quadruple hearsays being headlined and with all of the witnesses who...give affidavits for a song (with) no way to impugn their credibility."

18. (U) Congress plans to continue to investigate two other scandals impacting on Arroyo. Hearings on the wiretapped conversations between Arroyo and a then-election official are scheduled to resume in the House on August 3. The Senate also plans to resume its inquiry into allegations that the President's family received payoffs from "jueteng" (illegal gambling) operators on August 3. Zuce is scheduled to testify in the Senate hearings on what he knows about jueting.

Comment

19. (C) The pro-Arroyo leadership in the House appears to have given into most Opposition demands regarding the rules, apparently because it did not want to be perceived as blocking the impeachment inquiry. Although the Opposition has picked up some support for its complaint, it appears less confident that it will be able to impeach Arroyo, and now seems to be aiming to use the hearings more as a platform to attack her. Zuce's claims are difficult to prove, and add to the swirl of charges and counter-charges embroiling Filipino politics. Judging from past performance, the Opposition -- which is trying hard to recover lost momentum -- is likely to continue to hold similar events in which alleged "witnesses" make various claims against Arroyo.

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